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THE CAYAPA AND COLORADO

By John Murra

INTRODUCTION

The *Cayapa* and the *Colorado* are the last surviving Indian groups in the lush western lowlands of Ecuador (maps 1 and 6). Once an area of extensive Indian occupation, western Ecuador is now inhabited by a Spanish-speaking population of mixed Indian, Negro, and white ancestry, known as montuvios. The *Cayapa* and *Colorado* have precariously managed to hang on to their jungle homes. Speaking closely related if mutually unintelligible languages of the *Barbacoan* division of the *Chibchan* family, they represent the southernmost extension of that major division. Comparative studies with other *Chibchan*-speaking groups in Highland and eastern Colombia, with *Quechua*-speaking Indians in Highland Ecuador, and with various Montaña groups should prove of considerable culture-historical interest.

THE CAYAPA

The *Cayapa* are a riverain people inhabiting the lowlands of northwestern Ecuador. Sprinkled through the jungles of Esmeraldas Province, an area of difficult colonization and control, they managed for centuries to avoid the enslavement suffered by their Highland neighbors or the ethnic annihilation of most Coast aborigines. Only in the past few decades have their settlements been pushed back into the hills by Spanish-speaking montuvio and Negro homesteaders. World War II requirements in balsa wood, rubber, and other tropical commodities have accelerated this process of displacement and acculturation.

The Cayapa River and its affluents, from the mouth of the Ancuje to the foot of the Andes, are the main area of *Cayapa* settlement. Barrett (1925) found three concentration spots: Punta Venado, Sapayo Grande, and San Miguel, corresponding to three political, tribal divisions, which might since have shifted or amalgamated. In addition, small groups of *Cayapa*, in various degrees of acculturation, are found in the Santiago Valley and along the coast into Colombia. Estimates of their numbers vary but hover around a mean of 2,000.

The chief source and authority on the *Cayapa* remains S. A. Barrett's monograph (1925). Barrett visited them in 1908–9, long enough to bring

Cayapa and Colorado and thereby systematically proved the relationship that had always been assumed on purely impertinent grounds (Moore 1962). The most recent classification proposed by Greenberg places Cayapa-Colorado within the sub family called Paezan, which together with Chibchan proper belongs to the Macro-Chibchan family (Greenberg 1956). This classification is similar to that proposed by Mason (Mason 1950:180). A claim that Cayapa is closely related to Mayan is proposed by Professor Aquiles R. Perez T; however, the documentation is not convincing at present (Perez 1960: 491-494).

History. The first actually reliable information on the Cayapa comes from the pen of W. B. Stevenson, who visited them briefly in 1809. At that time, there was but one group of Cayapa (those who lived in the vicinity of Punta Tuncabi). The chief, or alcalde, as Stevenson called him, carried a "baston, insignia of authority" which he presented to Stevenson. He then ordered the Indians to obey Stevenson ". . . and they advanced one after another to kiss the head of the baston, and accompanied us to the house of the alcalde, which was

175
114
175

encounted about thirty yards from the other side" (Stevenson 1829:420). Unfortunately, Stevenson's description of Cayapa life was meager, for he was much more interested in the Malâba, a group of reputedly wild Indians who lived along the Río San Miguel, a tributary of the Río Cayapas. The Cayapa were as loathe to visit the Malâba as Stevenson was eager to do so. After some hesitation, the alcalde, having been promised various gifts, ordered two men to take Stevenson up river. It is of considerable interest to note that the Cayapa chief had sufficient authority to order two of his people to accompany Stevenson into the land of the "savage" Malâba. Stevenson reported that the Malâba were quite gentle and that they spoke a variant of Quechua, a language spoken throughout the Andes from Ecuador to Peru and Bolivia. The Malâba no longer exist as an ethnic group; however, this is the term used by the present day Cayapa to designate a group of evil spirits that dwell somewhere in the monte or bush.

[625]

976

It would appear, given the position of the Cayapa near the lower reaches of the Río Cayapas and the Malâba on the upper reaches, that the migration of the Cayapa from their ancient Andean homeland as stated in

174

their traditional home probably took place by way of the Río Santiago until the confluence with the Río Cayuga was reached; thence, movement was up the Río Cayuga.

In 1879 Hale mapped on his map of Somosáchas province a "town"--that is, a center of habitation named San Miguel de Cayuga and in 1894 Bancroft recorded Cayuga living up the Río Grandín Grande and the Río San Miguel. The latter group is reported to have an alcalde (Bancroft 1894-4:6). Between 1859 and 1879 the Malibu had apparently been replaced by the Cayuga. By 1958 Barnett reported definitely that the Cayuga were divided into three tribal groups: Punta Verde, Zapalín Grande, and San Miguel. Each group was reported as having its own ceremonial center and being led by an /ʔaʔi/ or principal. During my 1959-1960 field trip, I was told by Gabriel Aragón, the /ʔaʔi/ of the Punta Verde group, that some twenty-five years earlier a group of people had left the Zapalín Grande section and had formed a new tribal unit with its own /ʔaʔi/. They left after a dispute with the /ʔaʔi/ of Zapalín grande concerning the re-establishment of Pueblo Viejo, the ancient center in the mountainous upper reaches of the Río